



National Federation of the Blind of Idaho

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January 24, 1996

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Office of the Secretary
Federal Communications Commission, Attention: Charles Logan
1919 M Street, NW
Washington, DC 20554

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RE: MM Docket No. 95-176, FCC 95-484

Dear Mr. Logan:

I wish to comment on one aspect of video descriptions which can and should be implemented by all commercial television stations and all cable channels. The cost is minimal.

When addresses and phone numbers are given for viewers to buy items or obtain information, the phone number and address should be spoken. This is sometimes done, but often it is not. For example, the voice may say, "Call the phone number on the screen" or "Write to the address shown". This effectively bars all blind viewers and most who have poor vision from taking advantage of whatever is being offered. The worst offenders are infomercials. Anyone who does not turn off the TV or change the channels may be interested in buying the product or getting more information. The proportion of blind and visually impaired persons who want to pursue, purchase, or inquire about it is about the same as the proportion of sighted people who respond.

Doubtless, it would take some planning to include phone numbers and addresses in the audio of such programming. However, television stations should be required to include this. If the stations are required to, the producers will find a way. It simply takes planning. The cost should not be significant.

Another area where this information is frequently not included in the audio is on community bulletin boards. Announcements of activities are sometimes shown visually, and no information is spoken. This effectively bars blind and visually impaired people from having the information and it should be corrected.

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I am enclosing a copy of a resolution passed by the National Federation of the Blind (NFB), the largest organization of blind persons in the country, which calls upon local TV stations to confer with blind persons about information that should be included in the audio. This is an effort to make television broadcasters aware of the need.


Most blind people are willing not to know the color of the clothes people are wearing and even to be unaware of gestures and activities which are not clear from the dialogue. When these can be described, it adds a dimension to the program--some much more than others, depending on the dialogue. This, of course, is a complex matter. However news broadcasts, infomercials, community bulletin boards, and other programming that provides phone numbers and addresses without which the other information is useless are easier to identify, and the problem is easy to fix. It should be included in the mainstream audio for everyone to hear, and not be available only on a separate audio channel.

There may be times when names are shown visually and could be omitted from the audio. Credits at the end of a movie might be nice to know, but their omission does not lessen the enjoyment of the film. Some TV programs list names of staff occasionally. If they choose to omit this from the audio, it does not decrease the understanding of the program.

I repeat that the essential information I am talking about should be included in the regular audio of all programming. Video descriptions on an additional audio channel are an issue I have not addressed here.

Other information that is often shown visually and quickly can be identified. Financial reports and sports scoreboards are examples. There maybe another satisfactory solution to the problem to give blind people access to this information. The National Newsline[®] Network (NNN) operated by the National Federation of the Blind (NFB) is establishing Local Service Centers throughout the country through which newspapers and other information is being made accessible to the blind via touchtone telephone. Included in this service are local service channels which it may be possible to use to provide audio information that is shown too quickly on the video to permit complete verbalization. This would not be a good solution for phone numbers on infomercials because it is too quick and easy to include them in the regular audio. However, financial reports and sports scoreboards are generally scheduled on a regular daily basis, and the Newsline[®] system may have the capabilities of carrying a special section for this purpose. For more information about the NNN, you may contact Mrs. Mary Ellen Jernigan c/o National Center for the Blind, 1800 Johnson St., Baltimore, MD 21230, or call her at (410)659-9314.

Very truly yours,


Ramona Walhof, President

National Federation of the Blind of Idaho

RW/tmo
Enclosure

RESOLUTION 95-06

WHEREAS, many informational programs and commercials are aired on television and cable channels that make use of silently displayed contact information such as toll-free telephone numbers; and

WHEREAS, persons who are blind cannot easily obtain this information from these broadcasts: Now, therefore,

BE IT RESOLVED by the National Federation of the Blind in Convention assembled

this seventh day of July, 1995, in the City of Chicago, Illinois, that this organization call upon television networks, local stations, cable companies, and producers of programs for the above throughout this country to confer with representatives of the National Federation of the Blind regarding the verbalization of essential telephone numbers and similar information.